

Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education  
Public Hearing: Governor's Proposed Budget  
February 16, 2016

Good evening Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education. Thank you for the opportunity to present a testimony today.

My name is Rafat Quazi. I am from Manchester, and I am a member of the Capitol Region Interdistrict Leadership Academy, also known as CRILA. This program is operated by the Capitol Region Education Council through an interdistrict grant from the Connecticut State Department of Education. CRILA's mission is: to provide a diverse forum whereby students will practice ethical and collaborative leadership through research and community services.

I am testifying today to ask that you consider allocating money for the CRILA program, which has been operating for twelve years as an interdistrict grant. As of last year, funding for CRILA was unexpectedly discontinued by the State Department of Education. I am here today to ask for reconsideration of this decision.

CRILA, every year, enrolls thirty students from various Hartford area school districts in a year-long program. Every year, during the summertime, the students take part in the week-long experience at the Colorado Outward Bound Wilderness School in Leadville, Colorado. During this expedition, students develop collaborative leadership skills by hiking, rock climbing, participating in ropes courses, and group problem solving which all together serves to build a bond amongst the members.

After this trip and for the remainder of the school year, these 30 students attend monthly CRILA meetings where they truly learn the facets of leadership, and what it takes to become a true leader. CRILA's final project is a student-created and run community service project designed to have a positive impact on the Greater Hartford area. The 2015-2016 CRILA group is organizing two community service projects. One project is an attempt to save this program that has brought us, and the previous students, so many wonderful experiences and valuable lessons. The other project we are organizing is providing food and other supplies to St Francis' food bank. We are working with a company that allows us to package meals for only 25 cents. To complete this project, we had to fundraise throughout our multiple schools and towns to pull together the necessary funds.

While the highlight of this program to many may seem like just a weeklong trip to Colorado, CRILA means much more. On top of that, CRILA is a class that students will earn a high school credit for. CRILA is an opportunity to conduct a beautiful, self-engaged community service project that will benefit the Hartford region. CRILA gives students the chance to learn from a challenging leadership curriculum that's designed to teach the values of an ethical leader and the skills to be a catalyst for social change/engagement. It allows for bonding between individuals of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and races.

What I am most proud of CRILA is for giving me the opportunity to meet such a fascinating cast of students. While Manchester High School may already be a somewhat diverse environment, the chance to meet 29 other incredibly smart, driven, and talented students who I am proud to call my friends, is life-changing. The amount of diversity and the number of life lessons and

morals that they all bring to each lesson is really what has made me grateful to learn and be a part of this CRILA experience.

I ask that you please reconsider CRILA for distribution of the interdistrict grant. Don't let your thoughts be clouded by what the program might only provide today, but think of the ripple effect that it has on these 30 students, and the kind of outreach that these students have every day, and will have in their future careers and lives as Connecticut citizens. CRILA offers opportunities that we normally would not have. It allows for development and growth. As CRILA students, we offer our appreciation to the Committee and to the State Department of Education for allowing us this great opportunity, please allow the students after us to have the same opportunity.

Thank you for your kind consideration of our recommendations and your enduring commitment to our state.

Sincerely,  
Rafat Quazi